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NASA Student Program Launching Futures

After nine months of preparation, high school students from four states will send their experiments to the edge of space aboard a NASA Orion rocket on June 5 from the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center's Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, Va.

What are these students investigating? What questions are they asking?
The future scientists and engineers will seek to measure radiation levels, audio frequencies, and light waves during the rocket ascent and descent. A fourth experiment seeks to gather a variety of information on rocket performance, which will be used by the students to develop a musical composition.

These winning experiments were selected through the NASA Student Involvement Program (NSIP), a national education program that links students directly with NASA's diverse missions of research, exploration and discovery.

Lynn Marra, NSIP Program Manager, said "one of the goals of NSIP is to engage students in scientific and engineering activities. By doing so, students will see the excitement in these fields of study and pursue careers in these areas."

"The student rocket program is unique within NASA," said Phil Eberspeaker, Chief of the Sounding Rocket Programs Office at Wallops. "The students are involved in all aspects of scientific rocketry -- designing and building the experiment; participating in the launch; disassembling the experiments following launch; and analyzing the data."

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“What is amazing is that all of this is conducted over a nine-month period,” Eberspeaker said. “The students and their teacher/advisors are very dedicated to meeting deadlines and developing a successful experiment.”

Marra added that another unique feature of the rocket program is that the students receive immediate feedback on the performance of their experiment. The data collected by the experiments is received at Wallops via radio down link during flight. In addition, the experiments are recovered in the Atlantic Ocean and returned to the students within hours after launch.

Eberspeaker said, “After the flight the real fun begins and the education process continues. If data is received the students begin analysis. If not, the students then must figure out why they didn’t receive the data and identify possible design corrections.”

During the week of June 2, the students will participate in the final assembly of their experiments, attend meetings with the NASA payload and launch teams, attend a session on rocketry physics, conduct preliminary analysis of their results and present these to NASA staff and NSIP participants, and attend an awards banquet.

The launch is scheduled for 6 to 8 a.m. on June 5. The backup launch days are June 6 and 7. Full coverage and commentary will begin at 5:30 a.m. The launch will be carried live via web cast at

http://www.wff.nasa.gov/pages/srlaunch.html

The final assembly on June 3, the disassembly on June 5 and the student final presentations on June 6 will be web cast at

http://www.wff.nasa.gov/%7Esspp/sem/video/video.html

Further information on the students’ projects and the schedule of events are at

http://sprg.ssl.berkeley.edu/rocket_cast/Rocket/subsem.htm

More information on the NSIP is available at

http://education.nasa.gov/nsip

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